

# Dr Roxana Hopkins testimony

I come to you today to advocate for the families whose students are not thriving in the traditional school setting. In the United States of America we provide choice in all areas of our lives, with the exception of the K-12 school setting. Parents and students are seeking choice beyond the agrarian school setting for their students learning needs.

In the early 90's Michigan created legislation that allowed for charter schools. The belief was that charter schools would have non-traditional formats and provide choice for families.

However the overwhelming majority of charter schools today in Michigan look exactly like any traditional school setting. 180 days broken into 6 or 7 50-55 minute periods with all subjects separated and learning fragmented. We want to propose blended on-line project-based learning as another option for students who do not thrive in a traditional school setting. A charter school with a 24/7, 365 days. An anytime any place, any pace setting.

You may be thinking to yourself, "The traditional setting worked for me." You may even be thinking, "It works for my children or grandchildren." I'm here today to say to you, be thankful.

The most recent data released by the Michigan Department of Education cites 22% of our students' needs are not being met in the traditional setting and they are not thriving, nor graduating from high school.

Allow me to share with you the stories of students for whom the traditional setting did not work and how one community is fortunate enough to have a choice for their students. A school where there are no rules, no walls, and no time constraints. A school where, as Governor Snyder puts it, students are able to take part in learning any time, any place, and at any pace. A place where non-traditional students and a non-traditional school setting meet and success

occurs. That place is Jackson Learning Lab. A place that serves the educational needs of 60 students who sought a choice.

Thirty-seven... 62%... of the students are homeless. They look for a sofa each evening and hope for a blanket when it's cold. In a traditional setting they are asked to complete homework each evening. If not, their grade is penalized. These students need choice.

Ten...17%...of our students are pregnant or parenting their own or sibling children. These younger children have doctor's appointments, and physical needs that must be met by the teen trying to graduate. These students need a choice.

Thirteen...22%...were expelled from a school for reasons other than weapons. 180 days away from school makes it difficult to catch back up with peers. These students need a choice.

Twenty six...42%...of our students are adjudicated. These students have multiple visits to court, their probation officers, and with counseling. Each time they would be missing school. These students need a choice.

Twenty-two...37%...were seriously bullied at school. These students need a choice.

Eighteen...30%...have tried or seriously considered committing suicide. These students need a choice.

Many groups and families in the community supported and anxiously awaited opening of a school they could choose for their students who were not thriving in the traditional secondary school setting. A representative group of community members came together to create a choice school that embraced the anytime, anyplace, any pace idea; where students could

receive academic support, while at the same time the school and students would not be prisoners of time. The planning committee was met with formidable barriers to opening.

- The cost of a facility that would be created to support the open concept was prohibitive.
- The local ISD and Community College were contacted to authorize a charter. The group was told that it would be political suicide for them to support such an effort.
- An application was submitted to all university authorizers. They were told that the authorizers had a limit on the number of charters they could authorize and there were none available.

Jackson Learning Lab mirrors the setting that our program embraces. A program that takes what is occurring at Jackson Learning Lab to the next level by including the visual and performing arts. A right brain school where students with right-brain tendencies can thrive and a school where students that are not being successful in a traditional setting can find success at their own pace, in their own place, and any time of the day or night or week-end.

Here are a few quotes from our students:

- "I'm so glad I am going to your school it's made what I thought was impossible possible."
- "i just wanted to say thank you for making school not only available to me but something i can enjoy."
- "without you and this program I wouldn't be able to graduate! your the best"

Please support legislation that will provide true choice to parents, not just a school where more of the same traditional school occurs. But truly schools where students are free to accelerate, accommodate, or supplement an already full schedule with learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.